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THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

OR

THE FOUNDATIONS OF UNSECTARIAN AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A SERMON

PREACHED AT ST PETER'S, EATON SQUARE

On the First Sunday after Trinity

AND AT

THE PARISH CHURCH OF BEDDINGTON

On the Second Sunday after Trinity

BY

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LONDON

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This Sermon was prepared for preaching in St Peter's, Eaton Square, and at Beddington. A friend at the latter place asked me to print it, which at his request I do.

R. G.

2 AMEN COURT

29th June 1877.

SERMON.

REVELATION xxii. 12-14.

‘And, behold, I come quickly ; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life, and may enter in through the gates into the City.’

WE are all anxious for men to be virtuous and wise, patriotic and public-spirited. We wish them to be good citizens, good parents, exemplary in the discharge of their public and private duties, honest, just, and true, diligent and earnest in doing their own work, thoughtful and considerate for other people.

But whilst there is great unanimity of opinion about the end desired, there is much diversity of view as to the means by which that desired end may be secured. It would be unprofitable from this place to describe, or even to enumerate, these differing views. There are, however, two modes of working out this great problem, from the consideration of which I hope we may derive some advantage: those two modes have been placed before us by Divine revelation in the Old and in the New Testament. For we know that one object of both dispensations was to lead men ‘to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God’ (Micah vi. 8); ‘to redeem them from all iniquity, and to purify a peculiar people, zealous of good works’ (Titus ii. 14).

Under the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to man as his Supreme Ruler and Guide. He is set forth as a great

God, and a terrible, as showing mercy unto thousands, and also as visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation (Exodus xx. 5). In the Old Testament God's greatness as the Creator, and His power in signally punishing the transgressions of His creatures, is proclaimed. With sovereign voice He commands, 'This do, and thou shalt live' (Lev. xviii. 5); with fearful iteration His judgments announce, 'This fail to do, and thou shalt die.' Religion in the Old Testament consists of a law enjoining certain moral and ceremonial observances; whilst the God whom it would lead men to worship is a Being shrouded in mystery: 'Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour' (Isaiah xlv. 15). The path of obedience was smoothed by the promise that therein they should enjoy every earthly blessing; that if they would hearken to the voice of the Lord their God they should be blessed in the city and in the field, and in the fruit of their body, of their ground, and of their cattle, in all contests with their enemies, in the enjoyment of an abundance of all earthly good things (Deut. xxviii. 3, &c.). Whilst, on the other hand, if they would not obey, but be disobedient, that then they should be cursed in the city and in the field, in their basket and in their store, in a blight falling upon themselves, their cattle, and their ground; for the Lord would 'send upon them cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that they set their hand unto, until they were destroyed and perished' (Deut. xxviii. 15, &c.). And what God threatened befel the people of Israel. Experience proved the truth of His warnings. But what were the moral results? The whole history of Israel is an almost unbroken account of revolts from God, and of sorrowing repentance when the rod of punishment was sent against them. To read what God designed His people to be, and then to examine what they were, is one of the saddest stories in the world's history. It shows that desire for what God promised,

and fear of what He threatened, did not suffice to make them obedient to His laws. It proved that there was an infirmity, and an aversion from God natural to man, which had more influence over him than any hopes or apprehensions concerning the future could exercise.

If we look at that which attracted His first people away from serving God, we find what is very instructive. They wanted something near to them which they could admire and love. Thus they made images to typify that strength and courage which they especially prized, or that power and magnificence, that beauty and sensual enjoyment in which they delighted: and substituted these representatives of those good things of earth on which their hearts were set, for the Lord God of Israel. The purity and excellence of the moral commands given them to obey were powerless against the natural inclinations of their own hearts. Even the Majesty and Greatness of the God who had revealed Himself to them by signs and miracles, and by an outstretched arm, could not wean their affections from deities which could make no such appeals to their hopes or to their fears, but which more nearly resembled that ideal of good which they had set up in the chamber of their own hearts. Very oppressive we know this first dispensation was felt to be. This is clearly shown by the narrow literal interpretation of the Ten Commandments enjoined by the authorised teachers of the law, but which in the Sermon on the Mount our Lord swept away as inadequate.

If we turn from the Old Testament to the New, we find God's dealing with man wholly changed. It is no longer a moral law with a Sovereign Author which is the chief thing set before us, but the Person of One who is God as well as Man. The Christian religion does not centre round a law but a Person. It insists upon man's inability to do what is good and right if left to himself, and points to that Person as able to give the power required to enable man to become

such as God would have him to be. The Gospel seeks to teach man what is good and holy, not by setting before him a law which describes what is virtuous and well pleasing to God, and by warning him against what is evil and unholy, but by showing him the Person of Jesus Christ. It sets before him the evil of disobedience to God, not by denunciations and threats, but by pointing to its consequences in the suffering and death of Incarnate God. It strives to draw man to desire to be what God designed him to be, not by promises of immediate advantage, or by threats of immediate sorrows, but by telling him of all which that Holy Person did and suffered in his behalf. The whole scheme of salvation set forth in the Gospel rests upon the Person of Incarnate God, upon what He has done for us, and upon what He will do in us; upon what He has accomplished in our behalf, and upon what He will enable us to do through the strength and power which He will impart to us.

It will help us to realise this the better, if we think of what is set forth in the Creeds. They really contain what may be called the motive power of religion: that is, they set forth what is to influence us, what is to draw our hearts to serve and obey God, what is to make us fear to do that which would be displeasing in His sight. And the manner in which they do this is not by assuring us that God is a great God, and a terrible; that His Omnipotence orders and controls our destiny; that His Providence is always watching over us to reward or to punish—to multiply blessings if we do what is in accordance with His Will, and to inflict upon us every sorrow and affliction if we are disobedient. But instead of that, the Creeds speak of the Persons of God; of the Father as the Source of all existence; of the Son in His special relations to man as the Redeemer of our race; and of the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier of the chosen people of God. And then, after setting forth the objects of our worship, they express in

briefest terms some of the effects which follow from what has been told of the God whom we adore; some of the provisions which a Divine Redeemer has made for communicating Himself and the power of His Grace to us. All our duties, all our moral and spiritual obligations, all that God requires us to be, and the influences by which we are to be converted into that which He designs His people to become, are drawn from what we are taught concerning Jesus Christ, not from the law of a carnal commandment such as was given to His people under the elder dispensation. If you compare the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, which was to be in a manner to the Israelites, as the motive power of moral action, what the Creeds are to us, you will more clearly see the vast difference between what was set before God's first people to guide and to influence them, to lead them into the paths of holiness, and to preserve them from evil, and what is given to us for a like purpose.

If we turn from the Creeds to the teaching of our Blessed Lord, we find further illustration of such instruction. Thus there are several parables which are designed to show how men are to become good and holy. The parable of the Sower is an instance of this kind. Its object is to teach how some men waste their lives, and bring forth no works or fruits such as God can approve, whilst others ripen, in varying degrees, those fruits of holiness which God can bless. And what in this parable is set forth as the source from which all that is good originates, the germ and root from which springs whatever in man is fit to be gathered into the garner of Heaven? It is seed sown by the good Husbandman; and all agree that this seed represents power or grace from God. The seed is the Word of God—the Word, *i.e.* the Son, or that which proceeds from Him; so that the whole of the direct application of this parable is to those who have received this Divine gift. In like manner, in another place, our Lord sets forth the same truth by likening

Himself to a vine, and His people to the branches. The life, the vigour, that which produces flowers and fruit, is the sap in the vine, which, by rising into the branches, causes them to be productive. But it is from the vine, which is Christ, and not from the branches, which are His members, that there flows the sap which furnishes the substance of the good fruit that God will own and bless. And so in like manner, when man's responsibility is inculcated, the point specially insisted on is the account which he will have to give of the gifts or talents committed to him by God. In the parables of the talents and the pounds, we have our Divine Lord representing Himself as a man placing his property in the hands of His servants. This property is committed to them that they may use and improve it: it is entrusted to them, not for their own personal or selfish advantage, but that they may so employ it as to bring large fruits of increase to their Lord. And thus we are taught that our ability to do good is derived, not from something inherently good in ourselves, but from something given to us by God; whilst we are also taught that we have the power of improving, or neglecting, what is thus committed to us, that we may make it produce certain fruits of increase which God will own and bless, or cause it to be unproductive. On the one hand, without this talent or pound from God, our moral nature would be incapable of doing anything good or right in His sight; and on the other, when we have received this trust from Him, it will not fulfil the end which He designs it to accomplish without our earnest diligence and hearty efforts.

Then, to look a step further: our Lord declares in no doubtful terms, that man must be brought into certain mysterious relations to Himself before he can be just and good, holy and acceptable, in His sight. Thus He says: 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matt.

xviii. 3). 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God' (John iii. 3); and what is meant by this St. Paul explains when he says, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new' (ii. Cor. v. 17). 'We are buried with Christ by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life' (Rom. vi. 4). And to impress still more deeply upon our hearts that these blessings result from a true and living union between us and the Person of Christ, the apostle writes: 'We are members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones' (Eph. v. 30). It would take time to show more exactly what is meant by these words of Holy Scripture, and my present object only requires that I should remind you of the manner in which they speak of the nearness and intimacy of our relations with Jesus Christ. In some real but mysterious manner we are to 'Grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ' (Eph. iv. 16); and by a renewal in the spirit of our mind we are to 'Put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness' (Eph. iv. 24). And then it is distinctly declared that the imperfection of earth cleaves to whatever does not spring from the power conferred upon men, through this union between them and their Divine Lord. For it is said, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John iii. 6); and our Blessed Lord assures us in the plainest possible terms that He is 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life,' and that 'no man can come to the Father but by Him' (John xiv. 6).

To make somewhat more complete the evidence furnished by Holy Scripture of the reality as well as the necessity of this union between us and our all-atoning Lord, I would ask you to consider what revelation tells us of our own state by nature. Thus St. Paul writes: 'I know that in me' (*i.e.*

in my flesh) ‘dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not’ (Rom. vii. 18). ‘Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,’ and so on (Gal. v. 19). ‘We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others’ (Eph. ii. 3).

We have, therefore, the clearest testimony to enforce what St. John says in our text, ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.’ To sum up how Jesus Christ is this to us: From Him proceeds the desire to do good, and the power of doing it: the longing for help to fulfil God’s Will, and the help which is sent down from on high; the pardon which sets us free from the chains and fetters of our old sins, and the strength which enables us to go forward in obeying God’s Will, and fulfilling His commandments. Whatever we do of good, must be begun, continued, and ended in Him. He is ‘the Author and Finisher of our faith’ (Heb. xii. 2). And thus it is that all our religion gathers round the Person of our Incarnate Lord. What we believe concerning Him becomes of the greatest practical importance; because, as we derive so much from Him, as we are so dependent upon Him, what we receive from Him will depend upon what He is. If He were not truly God He could not have offered that full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction which was needed to atone for the countless sins and offences of the whole human race; He could not have provided that power which is needed for the re-creation of every member of the family of man; whilst, on the other hand, if He is not truly Man, we could not be re-created in Him without in some measure ceasing to be the men whom God had created at the beginning. He suffered as Man for man, that man might from Him receive that which he had lost through Adam, and

through Him be restored to perfect holiness. And so it were very easy to point out the relation between the various Articles of the Creed and what Jesus Christ effects for His people.

The consideration of the manner Christ ordained for the conversion and edification of His people has necessarily the deepest interest for us, my brethren. For if we would be His, we must seek that salvation which He has purchased, in the manner which He has appointed. It is not for us to set aside and to reconstruct the revelation of God in order to adapt it more conveniently to our political necessities, or to the passing fancies or preferences of the hour. And yet that is what has been done. The real and cardinal objection to what is called an unsectarian system of religious education is, that it substitutes a religious teaching, new in itself, but fashioned upon the model of the Old Testament for that of the New; that it virtually makes of none effect the power of the Gospel, and seeks to take in its stead a system, or rather the characteristics of a system, which God permitted to exist (Gal. iii. 24) as a school-master to bring men to Christ, but which was to be for ever cast aside when the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in His wings. I will endeavour to prove what I have just asserted, though I fear that in doing so I must be guilty of some repetition.

The foundation of Christianity, as I have already striven to show, is Jesus Christ. Its doctrines are the events of His life. Its teaching gathers round His Person. Its attraction is to be found in His humiliation and love, which owe their greatness to His being God; in His perfect character and sympathy, which lose their special value, if not their existence, if He is not Man. Its power is derived from that grace which proceeds from Him, and which needs for its being imparted to man channels of His appointment. Its instructions become worse than unmeaning if they are separated from the strength to obey them which it promises, because it expressly

says that (John xv. 5) without such strength no man can obey them. The morality of the Gospel is much more perfect and exacting than was that of the law; if, therefore, the morality demanded by the law was much more than Israel could obey, what will the morality of the Gospel be without power derived from some new source whereby to fulfil it?

This being so, it necessarily follows that the very foundations of Christian teaching must rest upon Jesus Christ; upon what He is, and what He has wrought in our behalf; upon the grace and power which are hidden in Him, and upon His manner of dispensing these high gifts to mankind; in other words, upon what constitutes doctrine or dogma; and it is equally certain that such points are the very points about which differences of opinion arise. To exclude them, therefore, from teaching—professedly religious—is virtually to exclude all that is distinctively Christian, all that makes Christianity to differ from the religion of the Old Testament.

And when these are excluded, what have we left? We have our Blessed Lord as a great moral Teacher: we have His Words, telling men how they ought to act: we have His Life, showing men how they ought to live; but that is all. Now this is just what Israel had. It had Moses as a great lawgiver; it had the law which God gave by him; it had Moses as an example of a holy life, subduing his natural temper, dedicating all his powers to carry out God's purposes, and only once letting his anger get the better of his sense of obedience. It is quite true that the moral law given by Jesus Christ is more strict, more severe, more searching than the moral law given by Moses; and it is also quite true that the character of Jesus Christ, viewed simply as a man, is very far more perfect than was the character of Moses; but then they only differ in degree; if this was the whole account of the Gospel it would substantially resemble the law; it would only differ in being less attractive to

men's fallen nature, less likely to win their love and their reverence, less adapted to the wants of their condition. For, do remember what we mean by man's nature being fallen. We mean that, naturally, he is disposed to obey his own preferences, passions, appetites, desires, and not God's commands ; that, naturally, he is weak of will, infirm of purpose, selfish and self-seeking ; disposed to make himself, and the gratification of his own master-passion or inclination, the guide and controller of all he does ; that, naturally, he sets his affections on things earthly and sensual ; and is slothful, revengeful, proud, and does not find his happiness in submission, pleasing God, and love for others. How can men so constituted love the moral law of the New Testament, which runs counter to the whole bias of their moral nature ? It is obviously impossible. No promises will persuade them to love it. No threats will terrify them into fulfilling it. We should have a spiritual law, and a fleshly heart ; holy commandments, and unholy inclinations ; self-sacrificing requirements, and selfish promptings. And yet this must be our state if Jesus Christ was only a teacher, and a law-giver ; for then we must put out of sight the power of His grace, the influences of His Spirit, the efficacy of His atonement, the love of His offering on the Cross, the sufficiency of His redemption.

If you examine into the bases on which rest the schemes of religious instruction given in our primary schools, you will find them representing what I have said. The Church Catechism sets forth what ought to be the teaching of our Church schools ; and from beginning to end it rests upon the Person of our Divine Lord : upon the covenant relations into which we have been brought with Him, and the consequent duties which are demanded from us ; upon what He has done for us, and what He requires from us in return ; upon what He is and what He insists upon our becoming by the power of His grace, and the help of His Spirit. Children are not taught in it their duty to God and

their neighbour, until they have first learned that they are members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven : they are not instructed in what they have to do until it has first been impressed upon them that the power by which they can fulfil what is required from them proceeds from God the Father, Who made them, God the Son Who redeemed them, and God the Holy Ghost, Who waits to make them holy. On the other hand, from Board schools creeds and catechisms are excluded ; the teaching, as a rule, will follow the principle thus laid down, and will avoid all the definite and dogmatic instruction which creeds and catechisms are specially designed to impart. They will teach children that they ought to be virtuous. They will not teach them how to become so. They will teach them that they ought to avoid all vicious habits, dishonest inclinations, lustful desires, temptations to untruth, selfishness, or wrong doing ; but they will provide them with no power by which they may resist and overcome the stirrings of all such evil tendencies when they arise within. You will see, if you consider the matter, that this must be so, if what we profess to believe as Churchmen is true. For what can teachers say of Jesus Christ, which is not a dogma, if they speak of His being Incarnate God ? What can they tell of the powers of His grace, if they are to avoid all instruction which is not distinctive of the Church or of some religious body ?

Whilst saying this, I feel bound to add that I fear many of our Church schools have fallen short of fulfilling their high mission ; and I attribute their want of complete success to their having neglected to impress upon the minds of their scholars those great truths which they were founded to inculcate. On the other hand, it is not impossible that some Board schools, through the zeal of their teachers and the connivance of their managers, may have impressed a measure of Divine truth on the minds of their scholars. But I am dealing with principles, not with their application ; with

systems, not with the mode in which they are carried out. And of this we may rest assured, that principles do vindicate their power, and compel men to feel their force sooner or later. The underlying principles on which our two systems of education are founded may not as yet have manifested their full power and tendencies; but we may depend upon it that they will do so, and that at no distant day we shall find ourselves at the goal to which their natural tendencies point.

I feel it is necessary to insist upon the great opposition between the principles on which the two kinds of schools rest, because it is such opposition which compels us to make great efforts to sustain our voluntary schools. The world whispers into our ear, 'It is not worth while to trouble yourself; after all, is there such a great difference between the two kinds of schools? Is not the religious teaching in Church schools often very inferior? Is not the religious teaching in Board schools often very good? Let us try to improve the latter, and then all will be right.' And so it cozens men by its soft words of deceit; it cheats them into believing what men who do not believe in Christ's mission know to be false; it saves them from trouble and from parting with their money if they will accept this view; and so, as many as will not take the trouble to examine the principles on which the two systems rest, contentedly acquiesce. My brethren, are we of that number? Do not be satisfied whilst giving no answer, but face the question, 'What is the principle for which the advocates of Church Schools contend?' It is that Christianity is a religion founded upon Christ, and not upon a mere moral law. Is that worth fighting for? Is that a difference of opinion so great, so vital, so truly important to us that we will make sacrifices to uphold it? You know what Jesus Christ is to you, and your answer will depend upon that. If you are comfortable and easy in your mind and in your circumstances, satisfied with

the world, content to have your portion in it, then you will be hard to persuade that religion is more than a law to secure to us the continuance of the things we prize, and to free us from all anxiety about the future; but if you crave for something better, if you know what it is to labour and be heavy laden, and to long for a Deliverer, then you will never be content for the children of the poor of the land to be denied a knowledge of that salvation for which you have yearned and struggled, and which has been your stay and support in life. For my part, I feel that it is difficult for a man to be really a Christian, and not to contend to the very uttermost to base the religious instruction in every school with which he has any connection, upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The question which I have just put is a very practical one. As you are aware, in this great Metropolis of ours, the rich and poor, to a great extent, live in different quarters. Where the poor live there necessarily must be the greatest demand for primary schools, and the feeblest power of sustaining them. The action of the School Board has been to increase greatly the cost of supporting these schools; and now we find ourselves face to face with this important question, Will Churchmen make a sacrifice to sustain their Church schools? Will they give liberally to secure Christian teaching for the children of the poor in this great Metropolis? Many schools find the extremest difficulty in upholding their position; many come to us at the National Society and assure us that a little help for a short time will enable them so to adjust their shoulders to the burden, and enable them to sustain it. But without this help they must succumb.* Few, very few, Church schools have as yet been surrendered; but many are in danger. For the most part, Church managers have fought

* The Report of the Education Department, just issued, gives the number of Church schools as 10,046, and the number of Church schools surrendered to School Boards in the nearly seven years since the Education Act was passed as 379.

valiantly ; but they cannot perform impossibilities. And so they ask us, not to bear their burden, but to help them to bear it. They will struggle on, but to struggle successfully they must be assisted. Brethren, will you help them ? Will you, in this hour of trial, remember that the Church is one, and that we are really as much concerned in what is being done by the Church in Stepney, and Bethnal Green, and Shoreditch, and Bermondsey, and Rotherhithe, and Southwark, and Lambeth, as we are with what is being transacted in our own parishes ? Depend upon it that the only influence which can stay the flood of profligacy, and vice, and dishonesty, and irreligion with which we stand face to face, is the influence of Christianity. And what is Christianity without Christ ? It is a delusion and a snare ; it is baseless and worthless ; it may send us to sleep in contented apathy ; it can never rescue the nation, or save a single soul. It may make us comfortable in this world, but what will it do for us on the morning of the Resurrection ?

Such, my brethren, is our argument. I believe that the contest is between the religion which Christ came down from Heaven to reveal, and a religion which, in its present form, was invented yesterday. Would that I possessed the power of him who in days of yore asked assembled Israel, ‘ How long halt ye between two opinions ? If the Lord be God, serve Him : and if Baal, then serve him ’ (1 Kings, xviii. 21). But without that power, I would urge the prophet’s words upon you, and implore you to realise the issue which is before us. If you do this, you must strive to sustain the cause for which I plead ; if you believe that Jesus Christ is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last ; if you believe that He will come quickly and bring His reward with Him, and that He will give to every man as his work shall be, then you must labour to impart to others what you prize for yourself ; then you can never doubt about the call which God makes to you to sustain Christian education in the land.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

PRAISE. A Sermon preached at the Third Annual Festival of the Midhurst Choral Association. 1865. (Jas. Parker & Co.)

ARE WE BETTER THAN OUR FATHERS? Lectures in St. Paul's Cathedral. 1871. (Jas. Parker & Co.)

SOME OF THE BONDS OF SOCIETY. Lectures in St. Paul's Cathedral. 1872. (National Society's Depository.)

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